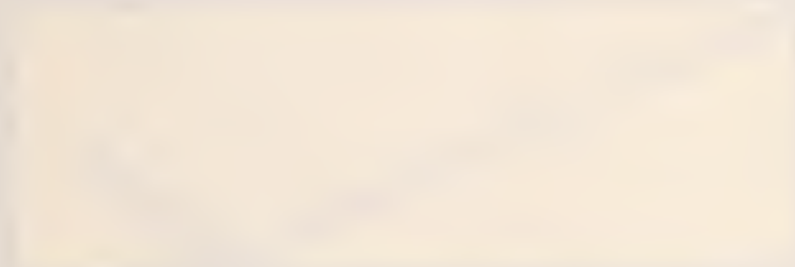


THE SOMMerville BASIN STUDY AREA



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In the eastern section of the Rockaways, facing Jamaica Bay, are two privately owned, relatively large, undeveloped parcels of land. One, located between Verram Basin and Barbadoes Basin, is presently zoned ML-1. The other, located between Sommerville Basin and Jamaica Bay, is zoned R3-2.

At the request of the Borough President of Queens, the Sommerville Basin Area has been examined in order to determine the feasibility of rezoning the area to a use more appropriate to its location.

The Sommerville Basin Study Area, bounded by Beach 63rd Street, Thursby Avenue, Sommerville Basin, and Grass Haddock Channel, covers approximately 49.75 acres, of which 29.17 are vacant, 4.71 in industrial use, and 15.87 in mapped streets, most of which are undeveloped. A large section of this area is in one ownership. This sub-area, which faces Jamaica Bay, is bounded by DeCosta Avenue, Beach 63rd Street, Grass Haddock Channel, and Sommerville Basin. It encompasses 37.19 acres, all of which are vacant, including 12.81 acres which are in ~~mapped~~ mapped but undeveloped streets. It is owned by a Mr. Taub and his associates.

The assessed valuation for land and improvements for the total study area is \$925,100, of which \$866,600 is for land and \$58,500 for improvements. The sub-area has an assessed valuation of \$543,000, of which \$542,000 is for land. The assessed valuation per square foot for the total area excluding streets is \$.63, and for the sub-area, also excluding streets, \$.51.


Field observations indicate that the soil seems to be firm enough to support new construction. The shore line, however, is in need of extensive bulkheading; the small amount of bulkheading now in place is in a deteriorated condition. There is street access to the sub-area, but no developed streets within the area.

The study area is presently zoned R3-2, a general residential zone which permits the development of about 25 dwelling units per net residential acre, and which is suited primarily for one- and two-family homes.

In 1962 the then owner of the sub-area property requested a zoning change from R3-2 to R5, which would have permitted development of about 55 dwelling units per net residential acre in high-rise buildings. He anticipated developing the sub-area under the Mitchell-Lama Program. This request was denied because the area is not an appropriate location for high-rise housing in view of its proximity to the J.F.K. International Airport.

The easterly portion of the Rockaways is within two to two and a half miles of the airport, and is situated within the flight paths of two of the airport's major runways.

The study area is directly under the flight path of Runway 4R-22L, the end of which is less than 10,000 feet away. According to Federal Aviation Agency figures for 1965, there were 36,650 landings on Runway 4R-22L (20 percent of the total number of landings for the airport) and 473 take-offs for the year, (.3 percent of the take-offs). To the west of Runway 4R-22L flight path is the flight path of Runway 4L-22R. At this runway there were 2,557 landings, (1.4 percent of the total,) and 22,779 take-offs, (12.6 percent of the total). The figures establish that Runway 4R-22L, which is directly in line with the Seamenville area, is predominantly used for landings, while Runway 4L-22R is predominantly used for take-offs.



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The Sommerville Study Area lies within the 100 PNdb (perceived noise decibels) contour area. This 100 PNdb level is generally regarded as the point at which discomfort is acute. Besides the noise level and frequency of occurrences, it has also been established that people are more disturbed by the noise associated with planes landing than with those taking off. The sound level of planes landing is at a higher pitch--a whining sound--even though the decibel level is relatively lower. There is also the fear that descending aircraft are more prone to crash than ascending aircraft. (Environs Study and Plan-Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, p.33).

Presently there are plans to extend Runway 4R-22L into Jamaica Bay, bringing the touchdown and take-off points even closer to the study area and consequently increasing the noise level.

It is our recommendation that, as a consequence of the incidence of noise over the study area, which authorities believe to be inimical to a decent residential environment, the area be rezoned for other than residential use.

There are other uses which we believe would be less directly affected by overflight disturbances. These are: open space recreation, small water-craft servicing, docking and supporting facilities; and manufacturing.

Although the need for additional recreation space in New York City has been established and is recognized by the City Planning Commission, we do not believe the Sommerville Basin Area to be an appropriate location for such development. Directly across the Basin, to the east, is an undeveloped recreation area, Edgemere Park, with over 250 acres. This land, along with other large developed and undeveloped recreation areas in the Rockaways,

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should be sufficient for community and City-wide needs. The limited resources available to the City for recreation development and operation, and the urgent needs presented by other areas of the City makes questionable the commitment of additional funds to this particular area at this time.

Small-craft servicing and supporting facilities appear to be a logical and appropriate use for the area, in view of its location on a large, protected, body of water. However, there are those who view the eastern rockaway waterfront, on Jamaica Bay, as not appropriate for marina development because of the distance needed to travel in order to reach the open sea. This evaluation is based on the tendency of pleasure boaters to be attracted to the open sea and to the Great South Bay areas of Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Therefore, according to this evaluation, there would seem to be little need for additional development of marine facilities in the southeastern portion of Jamaica Bay at this time. To overcome this deficiency and to facilitate boating in Jamaica Bay, it has been suggested that a canal be built across the eastern part of the Rockaway Peninsula thereby greatly shortening the distance to the sea.

This evaluation might be questioned, considering that there are existing facilities in use in Barbadoes Basin, Vernam Basin, and in Sommerville Basin; the Parks Department is planning to develop a marina at the north end of Broad Channel; and there are considerable marine facilities at Shell Bank and Hawtree Basins, along the north shore of Jamaica Bay--almost as far to the open sea as Sommerville Basin. Further exploration of similar developments for the study area might be undertaken in order to determine the demand for such facilities.

A C3 zone would permit the development of marina facilities. It would not permit the building and repair of boats, nor would it prohibit residential development. M1 is the only zone which would permit marinas, small-craft building and repairs, and would prohibit residential development.

Along with small-craft operations, this area seems appropriate for manufacturing and other industrial uses, providing that a site plan could be properly designed so as to fit in with the existing residential development surrounding the study area. There are those in the Rockaways who believe that industry is needed as a source of employment for the people already residing on the Peninsula as well as for anticipated new residents, but the zoning of vacant land in the Rockaways for manufacturing is not enough. A parcel mentioned earlier in this paper (located between Barbadoes and Vernam Basins), which had been zoned for manufacturing, is largely lying idle. We do not know what actions have been taken to get this parcel into use, but nobody seems to be beating down the door seeking industrial sites in the Rockaways. There must be a concerted effort on the part of the developers and the City to interest firms into moving to the area. Inwood, in Nassau County, just across the county line from Far Rockaway, has recently experienced development of light manufacturing plants and distributing facilities. There appears to be no reason why similar developments could not occur in the New York City portion of the Rockaway Peninsula.

In light of our studies, the consequences of future residential development, and the prospects of other uses being made of the area, we recommend that the study area be rezoned from R3-2 to M1-1.

Of the three alternative land uses which appear appropriate for the area-- open space recreation, small water-craft servicing, docking and supporting facilities, and manufacturing--two have been found to be suitable. These are water-craft servicing and manufacturing. Both these uses can be accommodated in an M1-1 district.

Rezoning the Sommerville Area for manufacturing will preclude residential development and will provide additional land areas for industrial development. It will not guarantee that industrial firms will move to the area. To zone the area for manufacturing use without supplementary programs for inducing firms to locate here could be a futile action on the part of the Commission.

Most of the area is now in private ownership and has an economic value to its owners. If the Commission does not act to rezone it, it could, and probably will be, developed for one- and two-family homes. Adjacent areas, with similar problems, have recently been developed with small homes and we believe that the residential market here continues to be strong. A possible consequence of zoning the area for manufacturing use, without programs for development, may result in the area remaining vacant and unproductive for a long time. The owners of property in the area might face an economic loss.

The Bartadoes Basin Area, not far from the Sommerville Area, is now zoned M1 and remains undeveloped.

We recommend the rezoning of the Sommerville Area to an M1 district, but we also strongly recommend that the City do all that is within its power to see to it that the area is properly developed and put to productive use.

We believe that there are two courses of action open to the City to initiate and secure the development of the area. One is to convince and assure the owners of the area that it will do everything possible to assist them in attracting industries into the area. The other would be to purchase the area and develop it into a relocation industrial area.

The first course of action is possible only if the owners are agreeable. The degree of their receptivity is dependent upon the industrial programs now available, or forthcoming, to the City and the vigor of the agencies which are empowered to develop and carry through these programs. The owners will have to be convinced that the City is able to deliver and that they will receive a satisfactory economic return.

We suggest, if the Commission wishes to proceed on this course, that the agencies empowered with industrial development tools meet with the owners and develop a program. A meeting could, and should, be arranged by the Commission. The Rockaways Chamber of Commerce, who have been requesting more industrial development of the Peninsula, could possibly also assist.

The other alternative open to the Commission is to have the City purchase the land, either by negotiation or condemnation, and develop it into a relocation industrial area.

It is our belief that this alternative might be the more suitable of the two. The City would not have to engage in what might be fruitless negotiations, could develop the area in accordance with its own plans, and would be able to screen which firms might move here in order to protect the surrounding residential community.

We have reason to believe that such a program here might be successful. Since the area is limited in size, 50 acres overall, it might not have the problems which have confronted the City in the larger industrial parks. A small number of firms might be all that is needed to get the project underway.


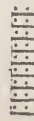


We also believe that there might be a market in the Rockaways for this kind of development. Urban Renewal programs on the Peninsula will be displacing a number of industrial uses which could be located into the Sommerville Area. Also, the Rockaways have had an acceleration of new residential construction, which is expected to continue. This has increased the size of the labor force available to firms which might be moving here.

There is another reason why we believe a relocation industrial area may be feasible here. Since Sommerville lies within the flight path of a major airport its problems are similar to other areas of the nation which are also adjacent to airports. The Federal Aviation Agency, who has the jurisdiction over the airports, has been on the receiving end of complaints by residents who live near airports and are disturbed by the noise. We believe it is imperative that the City press for some assistance from the Federal government in solving a problem for which it has primary jurisdiction. The Federal Aviation Agency has been urging the City to prevent further residential building in the areas surrounding airports. Assistance should be forthcoming from that source to help carry out this objective. The Federal government might begin with the use of the Sommerville Basin Area as a pilot project for non-residential development, with Federal assistance, for areas affected by airport operations.

If the Commission accepts our recommendation for the rezoning of the Sommerville Area, then we believe the next step should be a meeting between Commission staff and the agencies empowered to effect industrial development. The feasibility of development and the priority this area has are two topics which should be thoroughly discussed.

March 28, 1966

SOMMERVILLE BASIN AREA Land Use

-  Residential
-  Community Facilities
-  Industrial
-  City Owned Land(vacant)

